

The Supremacy of Christ
02/012/2023 (Week 06)
Paul's Heart for the Church

This is my message written prior to being preached. Please excuse the bullet point format and any grammatical mistakes. This is meant to be spoken.

Introduction & Review

- Please turn in your Bibles to **Colossians Chapter 2**.
- Today we continue our study through **Paul's** letter to the church of **Colossae**.
- And speaking of **church...**
- Let me ask you a few questions about **church**.
- You don't need to answer **out loud**.
- These questions are meant to help you **ponder** your feelings about **the church**.

- **So here goes.**
- What is your **commitment level** to attending **church**?
- What would cause you to miss **church**?
- Must you be on your **death bed**?
- Or (since it's Super Bowl Sunday) does an important NFL game mean **staying home**?

- How much of a priority is **church in your life**?
- not the building but the people and what takes place in the building?
- Is church **vital** for your **spiritual health**?
- Is it **crucial** for your **emotional wellbeing**?
- Is it **important** for your **relationship with both God and others**?
- Or is it just the thing you do (if you have time) on **Sunday Morning**?

- And for those of you (us) who do attend church regularly, **can you explain why**?
- If someone said to you, **why do you go to church**, what would your answer be?
- And **finally**, do you think beyond **attending church** to serving in the church?

- Now I'm talking about this church, Bridges, or any local church that you might attend.
- But the Church also refers to a larger group of believers.
- The church worldwide, the people of God, the body of Christ in all places.

- So ultimately the question I want us to think about is...
- Do you have a **heart** for God's people, Christ's Body, the Church?

- And I'll be honest and say that I think when it comes to church, both local and worldwide, many Christians have a **Grinchy Heart**.
- What was the size of the Grinch's Heart at the beginning of the story?
- It was **two sizes too small**.

- Well today, it's my hope and prayer that **our hearts** for the church will grow.
- That like the **Grinch's heart** at the end of the story, ours might grow **three sizes this day**.
- Or at least start moving in that direction.

- And so today, to increase the capacity of our hearts for the church.
- We are going to look, not at the **Grinch's heart**, but at the **Apostle Paul's**.
- The Apostle Paul who instructed...

¹ Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ. (1 Corinthians 11:1)

- Now last week, our focus at the end of chapter 1 was **Paul's Ministry/Service to the Church**.
- He rejoiced in **his suffering** for the church.
- He suffered that they might **both receive the gospel and grow in their Christian Faith**.
- He ministered to the church by preaching, ***making the word of God fully known to them***,
- Specifically **proclaiming Christ**, **warning** them admonishing and correcting their wrong beliefs and action...
- And **teaching** them both **theology (understanding God)** and practical Christian living.
- And then in the **final verse of chapter 1**,
- Paul concludes the description of **his ministry** to the church by saying...

²⁹ For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me. (Colossians 1:29)

- Paul toiled and struggled for the church.
- He worked hard but it was with the energy that God powerfully supplied him.
- **So that's where we ended last week.**
- We focused mainly on what Paul's example as a **minister to the church**.
- But we also saw through his **joyful suffering** and **hard work** that he clearly had a **heart for the church** as well.
- And that's what we'll continue to see in our passage.
- The focus today will be on **Paul's heart for the church**.
- And by revealing his heart, he models for us **what and how our hearts** ought to feel for the Church.
- And the first thing we see, the first thing that reveals Paul's heart is...

1. Paul's Struggle for the Church

- **Chapter 2 verse 1** is a **continuation** from Chapter 1...
- As we just read, at the end of chapter 1 Paul writes...

²⁹ For this (my multi-faceted ministry to the church) I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me. (Colossians 1:29)

- And then continuing the same theme he speaks specifically to the church,
- the Christians of Colossae.
- He makes it **personal**.

1 For I want you (Colossians) to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, (Colossians 2:1)

- **Laodicea** was one of the **7 churches** that the book of Revelation was written to.
- It was neither hot or cold but lukewarm and so Jesus spit them out of his mouth.
- But that was later and not our topic for today.
- For our purposes we should know that **Laodicea** was the closest city to **Colossae**.
- It was located about **9 miles north-west**.
- There was a close relationship between these churches and Paul would have expected his letter to be read in both cities.
- Many believe that **the Laodiceans** were facing the same issues (false teachers) as the Colossians.
- And so, Paul is addressing them both.
- In **1:29** He tells them of his **struggle in ministry**.
- But in **2:1** he makes it clear that he struggles specifically for them.
- And as we saw last week, the **word struggle** is the Greek noun **agon** - from which we get **agony**.
- The word originally was derived from the place where the **Greeks assembled for their Olympic games**, a place where they **agonized** in wrestling and footraces, where they fought to win.
- Paul had been **agonizing**, fighting, struggling for these Churches with everything he had.
- As my football coach use to say to us, **"Leave it all on the field."**
- Give everything you have, hold nothing back to win this game.
- That's how Paul **struggled** for these churches. **He gave his all**.
- And what makes this truly remarkable is that he'd never once personally visited either church.
- Aside from **Epaphras, Philemon**, and perhaps a few others he had met in **Ephesus**,
- Paul had never seen the **Colossians or the Laodiceans**.
- **It is thought that Epaphras** probably helped start both churches.
- So, Paul had no idea what these people looked like,
- He knew nothing of their personalities, their likes, dislikes.
- yet he **agonized over them**.
- Why this struggle for people he had never seen?
- Well put simply, **he had a heart for the church, the people of God**.

- His **old stony heart**, that was formerly intent on persecuting the church, (see Acts 9)
- had been replaced with a **heart which beat with love for all believers**, both Jew and Gentile.
- Paul shared something crucial with the Colossians, the Laodiceans
- and we could add the Romans, the Corinthians, the Galatians, the Ephesians, the Philippians, the Thessalonians and more...
- He shared the same relationship with Christ.
- They were all **in Christ**.
- They were all **brothers and sisters in Christ**.
- They belonged to the same body, **the body of Christ**.
- As Paul wrote to the **church in Corinth...**

¹² For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:12-13)

- As Christians, as part of the church of Jesus Christ, we share a special, unique & real bond,
- We are **united with one another** in and through Christ.
- The Spirit of God inhabits each one of us.
- Paul clearly understood this, and it resulted in a loving, caring heart for the church that would agonize, struggle over them.
- Even suffer persecution for them.
- Remember he's writing this letter from Rome where he's under house arrest for spreading the gospel.
- For building the church.
- Wherever Paul went in his ministry to the church, there were struggles:
- Riots in **Ephesus**, beatings in **Philippi**, stoning in **Lystra**, shipwreck at sea,
- dangers everywhere.
- As Paul wrote to the **Corinthians...**

⁸ For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself (2 Corinthians 1:8)

- The words he used here described a **beast of burden** which had fallen and could not get up because the **load was so heavy**.
- This was how Paul **struggled in for the church in Asia**.
- He thought he was going to die.
- And He was willing to give his life for the church.

- Why?
- Again, he had a heart for the church, he loved and cared for the people of God so much that in **2 Corinthians 11** he wrote...

29 Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant? (or as the NASB puts it “intensely concerned”) (***2 Corinthians 11:29***)

- Paul clearly identified with **his brothers and sisters in Christ**.
- When they were **weak, he felt weak**, and when they fell,
- it caused him great agonizing intense concern.
- He understood the truth that ***“It hurts to care.”***
- I’m sure he had nights when he tossed and turned as he thought about his fellow believers, especially those who were struggling.
- Paul obeyed the command he gave to the church in Rome.

15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. (Romans 12:15)

- Paul empathized with those who were part of the body of Christ.
- This is the kind of heart (love and care) that we usually only have for our immediate family.
- But for Paul the church was not like family, it was his family.
- Now we’ve already seen that Paul’s Heart drove him to rejoice in his suffering for the church and to work extremely hard, struggling in ministry to the church.
- But there’s one more crucial struggle that Paul informs his readers of later in **Colossians**.
- In **4:12** we read...

12 Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God. (Colossians 4:12)

- Paul points to **Epaphras** as one who struggles (same word agonizes) in his prayer for the church.
- Paul knew just how important this agonizing prayer was.
- He understood that the church is engaged in a spiritual battle for the minds and heart and souls of people.
- And he also knew that Prayer is where the real struggle is!
- I say that because in **Ephesians 6**, after Paul described how to put on the full armor of God so as to do battle,
- He concluded by telling the fully armed warrior to be:

18 praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints (Ephesians 6:18)

- **Prayer** was and is a crucial, necessary part of the struggle (the battle) to build the church in this hostile world.
- To Go and make disciples, to plant churches that would continue to reach out where they were planted.
- This was Paul's heart for the church,
- A heart that empathized, suffered, struggled in physical labor and spiritual prayer for the church.
- And it's this kind of heart to which all of us are called,
- a heart that is willing to struggle (agonize) work, pray, suffer for the church.
- For our brothers and sisters in our local church,
- and for believers whom we have never met.
- So, the question is, are you struggling (agonizing over) the church.
- And do your struggles drive you to ministry, hard work and prayer for the church.
- Like Paul we should struggle and pray for the church world-wide,
- the church that we've not seen face to face...
- Especially the church in places that have trouble and persecution.
- We should be praying diligently for the church in Turkey, Syria.
- We should be praying for Amy and Jon who are and will continue to minister in that area.
- But I'm going to be **selfish** for a moment and ask you...
- Do you spend time struggling, working, and praying for Bridges?
- Working hard, doing the ministry God has gifted you for.
- Praying for me, for the elders, for Liam and Brian and Ash,
- for those who teach our Kids, for those who lead our home groups.
- For those who sit in this sanctuary with you on Sunday mornings.
- **And for those who for whatever reason are not here.**
- And do you labor and pray for the growth (spiritually and numerically) of our church.
- Do you pray and work so that we'll be able to equip and send and support people from our church.
- I mean those of us who've been around know that in many ways Bridges has been struggling for a while,
- And if we're going to continue as a church, we need to struggle together,
- we need to labor together,
- we need to pray together that God would do a work among us.
- That God would continue to use us in this city and around the world.
- But for that to happen we must have hearts, like Paul, hearts that struggle for **the church**.

- Now you might ask, why all the struggling, what's the point.
- That's what Paul focuses on next, he struggled for the church because...

2. Paul's Desire for the Church

Verse 2... Paul struggles for the church so...

² that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, (Colossians 2:2)

- Now that's a lot.
- Paul wants a great deal for his brothers and sisters in Christ.
- Let's briefly break this down.
- I see **three things** Paul **desires** for the church.
- And there's a **progression** here...
- **First**, he wants their heart to be **encouraged**.
- That word **encouraged** is the Greek **para-kal-eo**, and is often associated with the **Holy Spirit**.
- It means to comfort, exhort, to strengthen, to encourage.
- And this encouragement they feel in their heart is based on **Paul's second** desire for the church.
- He wants them to **be knit together in love**.
- To be united in love for one another.
- To obey the **New Commandment** Jesus gave his follower in **John 13...**

³⁴ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. (John 13:34)

- Like Jesus, Paul sees the great importance of **true love for one another** in the body of Christ.
- And finally, he wants them to

reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery,

- Again, that's a lot but then Paul summarizes.
- **Which is Christ,**
- **Christ** is all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery.
- **Christ is everything.**
- If you want to know about the mysterious invisible God, look to Christ.
- So ultimately, Paul is struggling for the church, so that the church might **know Christ**.
- This is the **goal**, as Paul wrote to the Philippians...

⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. (Philippians 3:8)

- **Mature** Christians have always known that the key to spiritual growth, to maturity is an increased knowledge and focus upon Christ.
- Less than one month before **C. S. Lewis** died, he wrote this letter to a little girl:

Dear Ruth ... Many thanks for your kind letter, and it was very good of you to write and tell me that you like my books; and what a very good letter you write for your age! If you continue to love Jesus, nothing much can go wrong with you, and I hope you may always do so. (C. S. Lewis)

- If you love Jesus, if you have a deep abiding faith and love for Christ...
- A love and faith that flow from a true knowledge and understanding of Christ.
- I mean, you love the true Jesus, you love Jesus for who Jesus is not who you make him to be.
- Then, despite the fact that life is often full of trouble, difficulty, hardship, sorrow, suffering and pain,
- **As C. S. Lewis said to little Ruth, nothing much will go wrong.**
- Your knowledge-based love for Christ makes all the difference in this world and in eternity.
- So, the important question is, how does this knowledge of Christ come?
- How do we come to know and grow in our knowledge of and love for Christ?
- Well normally this would be where I'd focus **on the Word of God**.
- We know Christ through the Spirit's revelation of him in the Holy Scripture.
- And that is certainly true.
- But that is not what Paul focuses on here in **Colossians**.
- Listen again as I read **verse 2**...

² that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ,

- Notice the connections Paul makes.
- Hearts are encouraged by being knit together in love,
- And this knitting together in love results in reaching all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ.
- In other words, **our knowledge of Christ increases when we are knit together in love for one another.**
- Bible Scholar F. F. Bruce comments:

Paul emphasizes that the revelation of God cannot be properly known apart from the cultivation of brotherly love within the Christian community. (F. F. Bruce)

- Do you see what this means?
- This means that mere Biblical head knowledge of Christ will not bring

the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, (Colossians 2:2)

- For understanding and knowledge also comes through the love of Christians one for another.
- To know Christ more fully we need one another.
- Now why is this the case, how does it work?
- I think it works in two **complementary ways**.
- And when I say them, those of us who have experienced them will go Ah Yes That's It.
- **First**, when we are loved by other believers,
- When God's people express God's love for us, we experience Christ through them,
- and therefore, our knowledge of Christ is increased and enhanced.
- And also, when we (in the power of the Spirit) love other members of the Body of Christ,
- Then not only do ***they come to know Christ better through us***.
- But **as we depend on Christ** to love through us, our knowledge of Christ and his love is increased.
- So, when we are being loved or loving others, there are ***"full riches of complete understanding."*** of Christ.
- ***We see the love of Christ; we know more of Christ and his love.***
- This is an **important** message for the **Bible Believing Evangelical Church**.
- No intellectual process (alone) will lead to a full grasp **of the mystery of Christ**.
- It must be accompanied by a love for him and for Christians that he knits us to.
- We cannot pursue knowledge of God in willful, unloving isolation, rejecting fellowship with others.
- **Historically**, some have tried and have suffered incomplete or even **distorted understanding**.
- **"Complete"** understanding of the mystery of Christ comes in a loving **Christian community**.
- The **deepest knowledge of the mystery of Christ** comes from both the head and the heart.
- We must study the Scriptures about him intensely, with all our heart,
- and we must love him and his people with all our heart,
- and then we will know him as we should.
- So, when love is present in the church, it increases the knowledge of Christ,
- which in turn results in more wisdom and knowledge.
- This connection is made by Paul at the end of **verse 2 and in verse 3** where he states his desire:

² that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, ³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. (Colossians 2:2-3)

- This may be a **jab** at the false teachers who claimed to have **special wisdom and knowledge**.
- Paul said there was (and is) no other **treasury of knowledge**, for **"all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" are in Christ**.
- Of this truth Scottish Baptist Minister **Alexander Maclaren** remarked:

In Christ, as in a great storehouse, lie all the riches of spiritual wisdom, the massive ingots of solid gold which when coined into creeds and doctrines are the wealth of the Church. All which we can know concerning God and man, concerning sin and righteousness and duty, concerning another life, is in Him Who is the home and deep mine where truth is stored.... The central fact of the universe and the perfect encyclopedia of all moral and spiritual truth is Christ, the Incarnate Word, the Lamb slain, the ascended King. (Alexander Maclaren)

- Here's the point: when we love him and love the Scriptures and love the Church so that we are united in love with each other,
- The mystery unfolds and we are in touch with **"all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."**
- Paul's desire was that the Colossians would grow in their **knowledge and understanding of Christ**.
- He was concerned about their **minds**, their head knowledge and understanding.
- and that's why most of the **first chapter** gives us a deep **theological picture** of the Supreme Christ and His supreme work of reconciliation.
- But he was also concerned for **their hearts**,
- their heart knowledge and understanding that comes not only by receiving truths but by experiencing those truths lived out in the body of Christ.
- Loving one another, caring for one another, being there for one another.
- And so, I would challenge us, maybe you've spent a lot of time studying God's word.
- Maybe you have a clear head understanding of who Christ is and what Christ has done for you and the world.
- And yet, your relationship with him is lacking, you don't always feel it.
- You can't understand how you can struggle with sin when you know the truth of Christ's forgiveness of sin, and the holy Spirit's empowerment to overcome sin.
- You know the truth of his great love for you and yet you do not experience that love in your life.
- Let me suggest (based on what Paul says here in Colossians) it is quite possible that you are missing an important element in your relationship with Christ.
- That is a love for his Body.
- A practical, lived out, love for the His Church.

- So, we've seen Paul's struggle and desire for the church.
- Now he makes clear his...

3. Paul's Concern for the Church

- In **verse 4** we read,

4 I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. (Colossians 2:4)

- Again, the connection to what has gone before is clear.
- Paul was motivated to say all the above because he was concerned that the Colossians were being led astray.
- He didn't want them to be **deluded**.
- That word means to **beguile or deceive**.
- The **false teachers** with their **plausible arguments** or **persuasive, enticing words**, meant to delude, beguile, and deceive believers.
- And the connection with **verses 2-3** is this.
- These **persuasive arguments** could easily lead astray those who were **not knit together in love**.
- Because without love for one another they were missing out on the treasures of Christ's wisdom and knowledge.
- And therefore, deception would be **possible if not easy**.
- This was an important warning for the Church of **Colossae, Laodicea** and throughout history.
- Let me tell you a personal story that unfortunately illustrates this.
- Last week I mentioned that I was reading a book by **Greg Laurie** about the Life of **Billy Graham**.
- And I noted that **both men had an impact** on my life.
- **Greg** with my initial salvation in **1976**.
- And **Billy** with my **commitment live fully for Christ** in **1983**.
- Some of you have heard the story of how God called me, **a 20-year-old College student**, to the mission field in **1983 at a Campus Crusade Christmas Conference in Kansas City. KC83**.
- How the first night of the conference **Billy Graham** spoke,
- and at the end of his message, I stood (along with many others) and said Lord I will Go wherever you want me to go and do whatever you want me to do.
- And then on the second night **Elizabeth Elliot** spoke and it became clear that God wanted me to become go cross culturally as a missionary.
- That's the standard story that I tell, about my call to missions.

- But there is another part of the story that I don't think I have ever shared publicly.
- I went to **KC 83** with several of my close friends,
- Most of which (including the girl I was dating at the time) attended this church.
- And so, we (all of us from BFOR) had a lot of fun hanging out in our posh hotel rooms eating together and going to the Conference sessions together.
- But there was a guy who came with us, to my shame I don't even remember his name,
- He wasn't really one of us, he was a little odd, and we didn't really draw him into our group.
- And when the conference was over, he wasn't on the return flight, and I never saw him again.
- But I was told what happened to him.
- Back in the day, whenever Billy Graham spoke there was a "Christian Cult" group that protested.
- I am not sure what they were protesting, but they were there, with signs and they would seek to talk to those going to hear Billy Speak.
- I just ignored them, but apparently the guy who came with us and who we didn't really show love to, not only spent time talking to them,
- but ended up joining them and staying in Kansas City with Them.
- ***Because he was not knit together in love, because we did not love him as we should,***
- ***He was deluded by their plausible arguments***
- Through the years I have often wondered if I had taken the time and energy to love him, to draw him into the body of Christ, would things have been different.
- Could I have stopped him from joining those false teachers.
- Now that was 30 years ago, and unfortunately false teaching continues to grow in our world.
- We all face false teachers, both **religious** and **secular**.
- The **religious** try to deceive us by changing adding to the pure gospel.
- They promote a different God and Different Christ.
- And the secular are similar.
- The secular false teachers (which now fill our colleges, universities, and media) try to deceive us by scoffing at the pure gospel.
- They promote no God and an unrecognizable Christ.
- So, for our souls' sake, there must be a deep, growing knowledge of Christ and a love among us!
- Put simply, it's easy to fall away from a body that you are not connected to.
- And so, I would encourage each one of us to make connections.
- To come to church every Sunday,
- to join a small group,
- to come to the Sunday Morning Prayer time,
- to spend time with your brothers and sisters in Christ socially, be friends.

- And for those of us who are connected,
- Don't be like 20-year-old me, love those who God has at Bridges and those who God brings to Bridges,
- Draw them in.
- Demonstrate the love of Christ to them that they might not be ***deluded with plausible arguments***.
- So, Paul told the church of his struggle, desire, and concern for them.
- And then he closes it out like any good preacher with encouragement.

4. Paul's Encouragement for the Church

- Verse 5.

⁵ For though I am absent in body,

- Again, Paul reminds them that he is not with them and in fact has never met most of them.

yet I am with you in spirit,

- Despite his **physical absence** there is a **spiritual connection** between Paul and the Colossians.
- They are **both in Christ**, brothers, and sisters in Christ.
- They share the same **Spirit of God** and therefore in a sense he is with them.
- And of course, he heard everything about them from Epaphras who came to Rome to solicit Paul's help with the false teachers.
- And so based on this, Paul encourages the church...
- He is with them in spirit,

rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ. (Colossians 2:5)

- Paul began this section in **verse 24 of Chapter 1** by saying he **rejoiced in his suffering** for the sake of the church.
- His suffering was **beneficial for the church**, therefore he rejoiced.
- And now he **rejoices in the church that he and Christ and others have suffered for**.
- He **rejoices in two characteristics** of the church.
- And in so doing he is encouraging them to continue in this way.
- They should continue with their **good order** or **discipline** as the **NASB** translates it.
- and the **firmness or stability** of their faith.
- These words (good order and firmness) in the Greek are military terms.
- Paul is encouraging the Colossians to continue to be like soldiers,
- He wants them to be a band of brothers (and sisters)
- Being knit together in love, growing in their head and heart knowledge of Christ,
- standing firm in the faith, resisting the enemy, resisting, and fighting against these false teachers.

- He is saying I rejoice in you; you're doing good now keep it up...
- And I would rejoice and encourage us in the same way.
- At Bridges we share these characteristics,
- For the most part we are a **disciplined lot** who are **firm in our faith**.
- But like the Colossians there is room for growth.
- There is room to struggle in our labors and prayers **for the church**.
- There is room to increase in **love for Christ and one another as members of his church**.
- Resulting in increased knowledge and understanding of Christ.
- That we might avoid being deluded and disconnected from Him and his church.
- **Put simply there is room for our hearts for Christ and His church to increase.**
- Would you pray with me to that end.